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Items for discussion and decision: World Statistics Day

World Statistics Day

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session (see E/2010/24, chap. I.A.). The report presents an overview of activities undertaken by the statistical community worldwide to mark the first World Statistics Day, held on 20 October 2010, and to celebrate the many achievements of official statistics and the core values of service, integrity and professionalism. The Commission is invited to comment on the relevance and effectiveness of the activities and the proposed options for future celebration of World Statistics Day.

Points for discussion by the Commission are contained in paragraph 44.

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I. Background to World Statistics Day

1. At its forty-first session, the United Nations Statistical Commission, in its decision 41/109,[1] endorsed 20 October 2010 as the date for the first World Statistics Day, as well as the general theme of "Celebrating the many achievements of official statistics" and the core values of service, integrity and professionalism, while recognizing that each country might develop its own national theme, taking into account national priorities and circumstances. The Commission urged all Member States to observe World Statistics Day and to organize related activities not only in cooperation with all institutes of the national statistical systems, but also with researchers, academia, media and other users of statistics.

2. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to communicate with all heads of Government, conveying a message regarding the importance of official statistics, emphasizing the need for national Governments to provide sufficient support to the national statistical systems and requesting Member States to observe World Statistics Day.

3. The Commission requested the United Nations Statistics Division to prepare a repository and resource kit on World Statistics Day celebrations and activities, to make it available on a designated website and to report back to the Commission at its forty-second session on the experiences related to World Statistics Day 2010 in order to discuss the periodicity of the event.

4. The General Assembly, recalling the long history of official statistics and the facilitating role played by the United Nations, acknowledging the fundamental importance of sustaining national statistical capacity and recalling the adoption of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics,[2] decided, in its resolution 64/267, to designate 20 October 2010 as World Statistics Day. Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and other regional and international organizations were invited to observe World Statistics Day in an appropriate manner.

5. On 14 July 2010, the Secretary-General wrote to heads of State or Government, encouraging Member States to celebrate World Statistics Day by acknowledging and celebrating the role of statistics in social and economic development.

6. The Director of the United Nations Statistics Division contacted United Nations resident coordinators, encouraging United Nations country teams to support the national statistical authorities in their country in organizing and publicizing public events on the occasion of World Statistics Day. The Director also regularly updated national statistical offices on the preparations for World Statistics Day and invited them to provide information on their planned activities.

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[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2009/24), chap. I.B.

[2] Ibid., *1994, Supplement No. 9* (E/1994/29), para. 59.

II. Activities held in celebration of the first World Statistics Day

A. Website and other promotional tools

7. As requested by the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division developed a website to collect and promote all national, regional and international activities related to the Day (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/wsd). The website included the following:

- Information on activities undertaken by countries and areas, international organizations, universities and non-governmental organizations
- Display of posters, flyers, documents and videos produced worldwide, and messages by the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Director of the Statistics Division
- Short articles featuring newsworthy and innovative activities
- A special box and web pages to facilitate downloads of press kit materials, videos, logos, banners and posters

8. The essential purpose of the website was to offer an opportunity to national statistical offices, international organizations and other actors to view the quantity and quality of activities organized to celebrate World Statistics Day worldwide. The website was instrumental in informing all those interested in organizing events and involving senior officials. Even after the official Day, the website remains a useful repository, documenting the various events and materials developed.

9. In addition, the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat developed home pages in the six official United Nations languages (http://www.un.org/es/events/statisticsday), facilitating access to the official website maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division.

10. More than 50,000 people visited the official website in October 2010, with a peak of 22,000 on 20 October alone, the result of the large number of national statistical offices, international organizations and media that provided direct links to the official website.

11. The communications campaign for the Day used YouTube (on which various promotional videos were posted), Facebook and Twitter. The Facebook account drew nearly 4,000 followers, many stating how proud they were to be statisticians and how glad they were that their work would be recognized through the dedication of an international day to them. Many users posted links to articles regarding the Day or on activities to celebrate the Day, such as posters drawn by high school students.

12. A logo for the Day was developed with the assistance of the Department of Public Information. This logo (available in all United Nations languages) was used and adapted by national statistical offices and associations for a wide range of promotional materials or banners, and translated into many non-United Nations languages including Farsi, Portuguese and Turkish.

13. A poster showcasing the logo in six languages was developed by the United Nations Statistics Division. Nearly 6,000 copies of this poster were distributed well

in advance to national and regional statistical offices, United Nations agencies, resident coordinators and information centres worldwide.

14. Some 60 national statistical offices and 10 international organizations developed and printed their own posters and banners, usually including the original logo. The diversity and creativity of posters developed worldwide may be appreciated by viewing those displayed on a flashing carousel on the official website's home page and on a poster repository web page. Other national statistical offices simply reprinted the United Nations posters themselves.

15. Many videos were developed in the framework of World Statistics Day to promote statistical work and censuses among various audiences. In most cases, these products will remain usable in the future to explain official statistics to the public and build public support for statistical work. The World Statistics Day website includes videos developed in various countries and by international organizations. These are also available on YouTube's World Statistics Day channel (http://www.youtube.com/user/UNStatistics).

16. National statistical offices in 80 countries either issued press releases and/or had proactive relations with the press which generated media coverage on World Statistics Day. As requested by the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division developed a press kit that was downloadable from the official website. It included a general press release on the Day, a compilation of events organized worldwide and special messages by senior United Nations officials, including the Secretary-General. The press kit was made available electronically to all United Nations information centres and was used in hard copies at United Nations Headquarters and at the Shanghai World Expo.

17. The United Nations information machinery was fully harnessed in support of World Statistics Day and undertook the following activities:

- Production and dissemination of a five-minute video, "Honouring Statisticians Globally"
- Webcast of a press conference held on World Statistics Day at United Nations Headquarters
- Dissemination of an audio-visual package on this press event to TV networks worldwide through UNifeed
- Reports on World Statistics Day by United Nations Radio in all United Nations languages plus Portuguese (UN Radio programmes are regularly broadcast by some 600 radio stations worldwide)
- Articles published on the United Nations News Centre website (and reposted by many websites worldwide)
- Dissemination of press materials through the website for official United Nations press releases and the network of 63 United Nations information centres

18. United Nations Information Centre Lima translated into Spanish the general press release on the Day which was disseminated to other information centres in Latin America. The Centre also arranged interviews for a visiting official of the United Nations Statistics Division taking part in Lima's World Statistics Day event.

19. United Nations Information Centre Tokyo organized a United Nations stand at a popular national statistical fair and presented the video "Honouring Statisticians Globally" to the public with a Japanese translation of its script.

B. National activities

20. Activities to celebrate World Statistics Day were organized by statistical offices, associations and universities in at least 130 countries and areas (see annex I). These activities took the form of public events such as conferences, seminars or round tables, often with the participation of ministers and other senior Government officials. Press briefings were held in many countries to present statistical work to a wide public, in many cases in conjunction with the release of new statistics or information related to a census just held or being held. Radio and TV interviews and quizzes were also held. National statistical offices in some 80 countries promoted the Day, generating significant media coverage worldwide.

21. Information materials were distributed in schools to promote an upcoming census in one country. Commemorative stamps were issued and exhibits displayed in a number of countries. Some 60 national statistical offices produced promotional materials, such as special web pages, posters and flyers.

22. Special messages honouring statisticians were also issued by prime ministers or heads of State or Government. Ministers or other senior officials took part in public events or released messages to celebrate the Day. Numerous conferences, round tables and ceremonies were held in countries worldwide.

23. World Statistics Day was used in a large number of countries and areas as an opportunity to announce a census (through public meetings, round tables, press briefings, or with promotional materials in schools or poster competitions) or report on the results of recent surveys or censuses and to release new statistics of interest to the general public as a way to draw media attention.

24. In addition to those events organized by national statistical offices, a number of activities were organized by universities and various local or regional associations.

C. Activities of international/regional organizations

25. Some 40 international and regional entities (see annex II) observed World Statistics Day, often organizing joint conferences or round tables. In Geneva, a conference entitled "Measuring a Globalized World: Geneva Contribution" was convened jointly by nine United Nations agencies. In Vienna, three United Nations agencies organized a joint seminar and an exhibit. In Washington, D.C., the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank held a joint series of thematic meetings.

26. One way to draw public attention to the usefulness of official statistics was to launch new statistical materials in the context of World Statistics Day. International and regional organizations drew attention to the Day by launching reports illustrating the contribution of official statistics to the progress of societies.

27. *The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics*,[3] a five-yearly report on the situation of women produced by the United Nations Statistics Division, was launched at United Nations Headquarters in New York, at the World EXPO in Shanghai in the presence of the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (at a joint United Nations-China ceremony to mark the Day) and at the headquarters of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok.

28. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) launched its latest statistical report, *The World in 2010: ICT facts and figures*, in conjunction with the Day. This report also generated massive media coverage mentioning World Statistics Day, including in numerous technology-related media and websites. The International Labour Organization and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development launched new specialized databases on 20 October.

29. To celebrate the Day, Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union, released a new publication, *The EU in the world: A statistical portrait*, and issued a press release jointly with each national statistical office of its 27 member States.

30. The Caribbean Community mobilized its member States and associate members to hold programmes of events bridging Caribbean Statistical Day (15 October) and World Statistics Day, including through statistical quizzes, slogans and jingle competitions in schools.

31. Other organizations held special events to celebrate the Day and/or issued press releases, including the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (Beirut), the European Central Bank (Frankfurt, Germany), the International Civil Aviation Organization (Montreal, Canada), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Paris), UNICEF (New York and Barbados), the World Tourism Organization (Madrid), the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the World Customs Organization (Brussels).

32. Also worth mentioning are conferences held by the Islamic Society of Statistical Sciences and the International Association for Official Statistics, respectively in Lahore, Pakistan and Santiago.

33. In several countries, the United Nations resident coordinators either took part in a national event or were involved in organizing them (for instance in Cuba, Ghana, Mauritius, Niger, Peru, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates).

III. Review of media coverage

34. Given the multitude of international days, there was a risk that the media would ignore or trivialize World Statistics Day. The media's response was, however, overwhelming and positive, emphasizing the importance of statistical work and the need to continue improving it. Never in the past was there so much coverage in the media about the value of statistical work and its role in the society.

35. A large number of articles reported activities at the national or local level (including at universities and regional statistical offices). Other articles reported

[3] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.XVII.11.

declarations or statements by national leaders, especially when they involved a head of State or prime minister.

36. A large number of articles and interviews quoted ministers and/or chief statisticians, often calling for national efforts to continue to improve statistics, releasing news related to statistics or to a census, encouraging the public to participate in a census, or announcing new laws governing statistics. There were also commentaries in the media about achievements, gaps or controversies related to national statistics or censuses.

37. The launches of the United Nations Statistics Division's report *The World's Women 2010* in Bangkok, New York and Shanghai (as a concrete example of the contribution of official statistics to social progress) also generated important media coverage worldwide, especially through key international, regional and national press agencies, by high-profile media like *The New York Times* and *International Herald Tribune*, but also by a large number of media worldwide which focused on statistics of national or regional interest. Their articles usually mentioned World Statistics Day prominently and were published or posted in more than a hundred newspapers and websites worldwide.

38. The ITU report *The World in 2010: ICT facts and figures* also generated important media coverage mentioning World Statistics Day, especially in technology or business sections of mainstream media and in information technology-related websites/publications.

39. The message by the Secretary-General and the various press releases and articles produced by the United Nations and specialized agencies were quoted or reposted on a large number of websites worldwide.

IV. Overall evaluation

40. The celebration of World Statistics Day has succeeded in raising the profile of official statistics in many countries and internationally. This is all the more remarkable as in many countries and international organizations no significant additional resources were made available to organize activities or promote the Day. Many of the activities were the result of the creativity and efforts by statisticians around the world. World Statistics Day quite clearly turned into a motivational event for the statistical community.

41. The increased awareness of the importance of official statistics among policymakers and the general public is expected to have a positive long-term impact for the development of official statistics. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that in many places a dialogue with a variety of user groups was initiated which is likely to continue beyond the Day itself.

42. Based on this successful first experience, future World Statistics Days could be even more ambitious in this particular respect, reaching more systematically beyond the traditional user groups to create connections with specific audiences such as youth and educational institutions. At the international level, the organization of joint events has led to improved cooperation among international agencies active in the field of statistics.

43. Since this unprecedented event has been such a successful opportunity for building support for and better understanding of official statistics among the general public and policymakers worldwide, the Statistical Commission may wish to consider recommending to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly the designation of a World Statistics Day in the foreseeable future.

V. Points for discussion

44. **The Commission may wish:**

(a) **To comment on the observance of the World Statistics Day;**

(b) **To consider making World Statistics Day a regular celebration to be observed by national, subregional, regional and international statistical offices;**

(c) **To consider the possible time interval for the celebrations, for example every five years (those ending with a 5 or a 0);**

(d) **To propose appropriate mechanisms to organize the next World Statistics Day.**

Annex I

Countries and areas that celebrated World Statistics Day[a]

Afghanistan

Aland Islands

Algeria

Andorra

Anguilla

Argentina

Armenia

Australia

Austria

Azerbaijan

Bahamas

Barbados

Bangladesh

Belarus

Belgium

Bermuda

Bhutan

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)

Botswana

Brazil

Bulgaria

Burkina Faso

Cambodia

Cameroon

Canada

Chad

Chile

China

Colombia

[a] The list of countries and areas is based on information available to the United Nations Statistics Division as of 11 November 2010.

Costa Rica

Croatia

Cuba

Curaçao

Cyprus

Czech Republic

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dominican Republic

Dominica

Ecuador

Egypt

Estonia

Ethiopia

Fiji

Finland

France

Gabon

Gambia

Germany

Georgia

Ghana

Greece

Grenada

Guinea-Bissau

Guyana

Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)

Hungary

Indonesia

Iraq

Iran, Islamic Republic of

Ireland

Israel

Italy

Jamaica

Japan

Jordan

Kazakhstan

Kenya

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Latvia

Lebanon

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Madagascar

Malawi

Malaysia

Maldives

Mali

Malta

Mauritius

Mexico

Micronesia (Federated States of)

Mongolia

Morocco

Mozambique

Myanmar

Nepal

Netherlands

New Zealand

Nicaragua

Nigeria

Norway

Occupied Palestinian Territory

Oman

Pakistan

Paraguay

Papua New Guinea

Peru

Philippines

Poland

Portugal

Puerto Rico

Qatar

Republic of Korea

Republic of Moldova

Romania

Russian Federation

Saudi Arabia

Serbia

Sierra Leone

Singapore

Slovakia

South Africa

Spain

Sri Lanka

Suriname

Switzerland

Tajikistan

Thailand

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Timor-Leste

Tonga

Trinidad and Tobago

Tunisia

Turkey

Turkmenistan

Ukraine

United Arab Emirates (Sharjah)

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

United Republic of Tanzania

United States of America

Vanuatu

Yemen

Zimbabwe

Annex II

List of international and regional entities that observed World Statistics Day[a]

Afristat (Observatoire économique et statistique d'Afrique subsaharienne)

Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración

Caribbean Community

Cities Alliance

European Central Bank

Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Union)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

International Association for Official Statistics

International Atomic Energy Agency

International Civil Aviation Organization

International Energy Agency

International Labour Organization

International Monetary Fund

International Statistical Institute

International Telecommunication Union

Islamic Society of Statistical Sciences

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Pacific Community

PARIS21 (Partnership for Statistics in the 21st Century)

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa/African Centre for Statistics

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

[a] The list of international and regional entities is based on information available to the United Nations Statistics Division as of 11 November 2010.

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

World Tourism Organization

World Bank

World Customs Organization

World Health Organization

World Intellectual Property Organization

World Meteorological Organization

World Trade Organization